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Question Time: Thumbs out on the road

Have you hitchhiked or given rides before?

By Rob Burgess

Tribune night editor

[Editor's note: To participate in future queries, keep an eye on our Twitter and Facebook accounts.]

We've all passed someone on the side of the road with their thumb out, waiting for a ride. Maybe you've been the one on the other side of the transaction, hoping someone will pick you up. Perhaps, you've done both at various times. Or, maybe, you'd never consider doing either. Whatever the case, it's an interesting question. So, we wanted to know: "Have you ever been a hitchhiker or picked up a hitchhiker before? Why or why not? If so, would you do it again? Why or why not?"

It should be noted hitchhiking itself isn't illegal in Indiana. What is illegal is soliciting rides on the roadway, unless it's an emergency.

"A person may not stand in a roadway for the purpose of soliciting a ride from a person who drives a vehicle unless the person soliciting a ride is faced with an emergency on the roadway, in which case the person may

secure a ride to obtain assistance,” reads Indiana Code 9-21-17-16.

Also, to accommodate the various answers this week, we’re tweaking the Question Time format a bit.

Yes

“I’ve done both. The farthest was from Colorado Springs, [Colorado] to Indianapolis.” — **David A Duncan**

“I guess I wasn’t much of a hitchhiker, but my van broke down and my son and I had to walk quite a ways to get home. [I was] walking down the highway and nice older couple stopped and offered us a ride. I hesitated at first but after talking to the woman for a minute or so I deemed it OK. We made it home safely and out of the cold. Thank heavens for kind people out there.” — **Michelle L. Turner**

“Yes I have hitchhiked, not by choice, though. I was driving home from college and was taking two of my teammates at a drop off point in Indy. We didn’t have cell phones back then so when my Chevy truck blew up on U.S. 41 near the federal prison we had no choice but to start hitchhiking to Terre Haute. We started walking north with our thumbs out and a nice gentleman gave us a ride to Terre Haute. The nice gentleman actually was a relative of

one of our other teammates. And yes, I have given strangers rides before.”

— **Lesley Downing**

“I have given people a ride to the nearest gas station that had broken down cars in the days before everyone had cell phones, but never hitchhiked or picked up a hitchhiker just walking along the road.” — **Rob Dy**

No

“Never have. Never will. Ya never know what could happen. Rather be safe than sorry.” — **Libby Jane Massey**

“Definitely not near the prison. LOL” — **William Hartman**

“My mom told me not to pick up hitchhikers or I might be the one walking! (Or worse.)” — **Janet Miller Jester**

“Whenever I’m driving in town and see people walking I always want to stop and give them a ride, especially if the weather isn’t ideal for walking. But I never do. I feel most would be grateful but you never know.” — **Hailey Alexander**

Not any more

“Yes in the ‘60s. Young, innocent and dumb. Haven’t since but I’ve [walked miles] as a result.” — **Deborah Hudson**

“I had always had friends who hitchhiked everywhere. I use to think nothing of giving [hitchhikers] a ride. Sorry to say I wouldn’t do it now. And yes because I would be afraid to.” — **Connie Whitehart Valdez**

“Have picked up [hitchhikers] many times moms with kids, workers trying to get home, a kid walking home from school, etc. Don’t much anymore. Times are so crazy.” — **Michelle LeAnne Bauer**

“It used to be the norm in the ‘60s and ‘70s.” — **Kim Lane**

Our answers

“I have never been a hitchhiker, nor have I ever picked one up. But I have picked up a copy of ‘Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy.’ I hear it’s great.” — **Hillarie Hazelton**

“I myself have never hitchhiked before, but my husband actually hitchhiked from Indiana to Texas and back in the late ‘70s and definitely had a few horror stories to tell. He had to hide under an overpass to avoid a tornado

and had to jump out of a moving vehicle in order to get away from a dangerous situation. I have picked up a hitchhiker before. My husband and I have helped a few male hitchhikers in the 32 years that we have been together. One you could clearly see was due to car problems and a couple others simply to help out the people in question. I as a woman would never pick up a male hitchhiker by myself simply for fear of not knowing what may happen. I on the other hand I have picked up a few female hitchhikers before while I was by myself. I did pick up two stranded woman hitchhiking but that was clearly due to car problems. The other was a young woman in her late teens or early twenties that just really seemed like she needed a helping hand. When I came across her I was on my way to work in Logansport and it was around 7:30 a.m. After talking to her a little I found out that she was fleeing from a domestic abuse situation and had already walked approximately 50 miles or so coming from the north. She had left her home in the very early morning hours that day. She only had on flip flops and her feet were badly blistered; she hadn't eaten anything since the day before. She only had the clothes on her back. As I spoke to her I found out that she had contacted her father and he was on his way up to pick her up from Tennessee. She had planned to meet up with him around the Indianapolis area or as far south as she could get. I stopped and fed her, had her contact her father and I went ahead and drove her south meeting him in Kirklin. Will I pick up a hitchhiker again? That's really hard to say. I think it will depend entirely on the situation and whether I feel safe or not.

Do I regret helping the people that we were able to help? Not in the slightest. Sometimes you just have to have faith that people are ultimately good. All that I could think about that day when helping that young woman was that I hoped that if my daughter was in the same situation that someone would help her.” — **Robin Harper**

“Nope. I had one time though where a very down-and-out woman in Indy was sitting on a curb at a gas station. She needed a ride to a hospital’s rehab clinic. I gave her one. She was not going to get there without help. The short drive was harrowing. She was maybe ODing and passed out but woke up when prodded.” — **Pedro Velazco**

“I have received rides from people at various times in the past when I had extreme car trouble, but I think it was clear I was actually in danger and wasn’t asking for a lot. I want to be the type of person who would help out a hitchhiker when I’m the one driving by, but if I’m being honest, I tap the gas a bit more and trying to avoid eye contact when I see someone with their thumbs out on the road. I guess I’ve succumbed to the propaganda of fear. Or maybe I saved my own life. Who knows? Once when I was living in Bloomington there was this disheveled man who jumped out at me as I was leaving the Post Office. He said he needed a ride to The Helene G. Simon Hillel Center at Indiana University. He was talking kind of strangely and he definitely didn’t strike me as being Jewish, so I was a little hesitant. He was

super forceful though, so against my better judgment I gave him a ride. On the way over he told me he was a semi-homeless man who did some maintenance work for them. He was nice enough and he thanked me as I dropped him off. I didn't have a horrible experience or anything, but I haven't given a stranger a ride since then." — **Rob Burgess**

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